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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT: NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Letter dated 5 December 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit the text of the message addressed to you by the President of the Republic of Belarus, His Excellency Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka, concerning the withdrawal from the territory of the Republic of Belarus of the last nuclear ballistic missile.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 71 (i).

(Signed) Alyaksandr SYCHOU
Permanent Representative of
Belarus to the United Nations

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ANNEX

Letter dated 30 November 1996 from the President of Belarus addressed to the Secretary-General

I should like to draw your attention to an event which is of the greatest importance for the entire international community. On 27 November 1996 the last intercontinental ballistic missile left the Republic of Belarus, and a territory of 207,600 square kilometres in the centre of Europe became nuclear free.

After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Republic of Belarus was the first country in the world voluntarily to reject the possibility of possessing nuclear weapons, and to proclaim a denuclearization policy.

On 4 February 1993 the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus ratified the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms of 31 July 1991 and the Lisbon Protocol to it of 23 May 1992, and also adopted a decision on the accession of Belarus to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a State party not possessing such weapons.

The Heads of State and Government of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe will be meeting in Lisbon on 2 December to adopt decisions on issues relating to the building of a new Europe, and on 5 December we shall be commemorating the second anniversary of the entry into force of the START I Treaty. On the eve of these important dates in the history of the continent, Belarus is demonstrating to the world community the peace-loving orientation of its foreign policy and its desire to make an important contribution to the cause of strengthening security in Europe and throughout the world. The withdrawal of the last nuclear missile earlier than the established deadline bears witness to the strict discharge by the Republic of Belarus of the international obligations it has assumed. The complete removal of nuclear weapons from the territory of the country is a clear confirmation of Belarus' policy of reducing the nuclear threat, thus facilitating the creation of an atmosphere of trust among peoples.

Ten years have passed since the time of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power station, and the Byelorussian people, which experienced its consequences, understands like no one else the real threat of nuclear weapons. The withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the territory of Belarus marks a new phase in the history of our country.

We are grateful to all the States and international organizations which, directly or indirectly, have assisted and are assisting us in implementing the START I Treaty.

We are convinced that the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the territory of the Republic of Belarus forms a good basis for the implementation of the well-known Byelorussian initiative regarding the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe.

The successful realization of the idea of creating in the centre of Europe a zone free from nuclear weapons could become one of the most effective ways of reducing tension in Europe and in international relations as a whole, removing concern with regard to the planned expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and to the statements by some countries of Eastern Europe that they are ready to deploy NATO nuclear weapons on their territory. The idea of creating a nuclear-free zone is an important step towards the strengthening of the international non-proliferation regime, is not in conflict with present-day military and political realities in Europe, and threatens no one's national interests.

With the withdrawal of the last Russian nuclear missiles from the territory of Belarus, a nuclear-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe has de facto been established. In our view, this can and must be given the force of law.

The Republic of Belarus expects that position with regard to nuclear disarmament issues will be properly appreciated and supported by the international community.

(Signed) Alyaksandr LUKASHENKA